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Muslim Women According to the New York Times: A Post-September 11, Reading of American News Coverage

Samantha Weiss
Elizabethtown College, weisss@etown.edu

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Samantha Weiss

Elizabethtown College

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Abstract

Prior to the Iranian revolution, the U.S. news media rarely mentioned Muslim nations or individual persons. Newspapers and broadcasts devoted large amounts of time and resources to covering the event. The uptick in interest quickly died down and that region of the world was once again left out of the news. That was, until the attacks of September 11, 2001. Unlike the loss of interest that occurred in 1979, U.S. journalists remained fixated on Islam. Between the years of 2001 and 2015, few large scale terror attacks occurred, but Islam continued to be "the news." Attempts to explain the religion or justify actions taken against Muslim-majority countries took up print space and air time since then.

The coverage of events, since 9/11, has been colored by the attacks of that day. Beliefs about Islam and misconceptions about Muslims have been propagated via United Staets news media to the general public that can be seen in much of the coverage of Islam in the U.S. No one has suffered from the ill-informed media more than the Islamic women. Coverage of Muslim women in the *New York Times* will represent this phenomenon: a country-wide disrespect for and misunderstanding of Islam, which will not accurately portray the situation of Muslim women at large. This paper will address the representations of Islamic women in the *New York Times* between 2002 and 2014.

Introduction

While studying abroad in Rabat, Morocco[1], I was surprised to find that representations of United States women were neither accurate, nor entirely fair. This sparked an interest in the representations of the women around the world and specifically those in Muslim-majority countries of the world. Remembering what images I had seen in popular culture and news in the United States regarding these women, I knew that I wanted to examine how these ideas compared to the experiences I had while abroad.

This paper will examine the representations of Muslim women in the U.S. print news media organization *The New York Times* between the beginning of 2002 and the end of 2014 for patterns and themes identified by past research. With much of the U.S. understanding of Islam being framed by the events of 9/11, the media representations of the religion, the people who follow it and the majority Islamic areas of the world are largely tainted (Zelizer & Allan, 2002). For several weeks following the tragedy, the news focused much of its attention on the event (Smith, 2013). News that was once reported solely to U.S. citizens was being publicized around the world, in response to the global outcry against the violence (Zelizer & Allan, 2002).

The Newseum in Washington, D.C. includes a display on the news coverage of 9/11. The room is filled with hundreds of front pages from the day after the attack. All tell the same story: of a nation fearful for its safety and a population trying to understand the situation. Without intending to do so, they also told the story of a country-wide misunderstanding of another culture. The reportage to come told similar stories, many of which became the only narrative through which Americans understood Islam.

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[1] I spent the Spring semester of 2015 in Rabat, studying international journalism at the center for Cross-Cultural Learning, through a School for International Training program. During those, I spent much of my academic and personal time learning about the culture and how people function within it, due to the differences between Morocco and the United States. With interests in women and gender studies, journalism and foreign languages, I had the opportunity to research within the context of each for this project, as well as the work I completed while abroad.

Though the initial coverage focused on the event, not Islam, as a whole, the first anniversary of the event saw an increase in negative coverage (Smith 2013). These stories, which oversimplified the complex religion and were based largely on stereotypes and fear-induced hysteria, created a media environment that was not friendly to Islam or its followers.

Over the course of the years following 9/11, several stereotypes about the followers of Islam – especially the females – have become the default depictions of the entire religion (Alsultany, 2013). These themes of violence, hatred and subjugation began to fill the minds of the U.S. public, fueled by a poorly informed media. Soon, a religion that was largely unknown to most in the U.S. became a topic of constant discussion and a target of retaliatory acts (Alsultany, 2013). Following 9/11, a rash of Islamophobic incidents, in the form of violent and passive hate crimes, took place across the United States. "In 2001, Arab Americans, Muslims, and Sikhs were victimized in nearly five percent of the total number of hate crimes reported that year (481 out of 9,730), a seventeen-fold increase over the prior year" (The Leadership Conference, 2009). These incidents also sparked a desire to "understand" Islam. Well-intentioned authors wrote misleading stories based on the country's sudden fascination with everything Islam and inappropriate deadlines that didn't allow for adequate research.

The articles written about the attacks and the religion took on different forms, but often reflected the same few beliefs by drawing on the same images. The current debate rests in the truthfulness of these images and their ability to be generalized to the whole Islamic population. There are 49 countries, spread across three continents, which are considered Muslim-majority, where over 50 percent of the population professes to the religion. The general understanding is that most Muslims are also Arab, though only 15 percent of the world's Islamic population are also Arab (Pew Research Center of Religion and Public Life, 2011). In addition, Australia, Europe, North and South America have a combined population of approximately two billion Muslims (http://muslimpopulation.com/).

In regards to women and Islam, the images presented, most often by Western journalists and ex-Muslim women, often depict oppression and violence as pillars of the religion, instead of isolated instances of its abuse (Alsultany, 2013; Vintges, 2012). The limited representations, which focus on the supposedly innate violence of Islam, have become the only representations. One crucial example is the U.S. interest in the veil as a monolithic, outward symbol of female subjugation. This symbol has become a fascination of Westerns, who cannot understand the culture they believe spawned it. Without knowing the nature of the practice or the variety of ways it is practiced, the western world often associates it with barbarianism and a lack of human rights (Barlas, 2002). Because the news often capitalizes on these depictions, the images created are projected on the populations of Islamic countries, but rarely compared to the realities of those places. While some individuals are forced to wear some type of veil, some women are strongly encouraged not to and yet others are given no instructions from the authority figures in their lives. A single misconception like this skews the understanding of the practice on a large scale, creating an inaccurate base of knowledge for others to rely on.

Some truths and exaggerations are to be found in nearly all media depictions, but the concern is the line between the two is blurred in regard to coverage of Muslim women in U.S. news media (Gameson, 1992). Based on the poor relationship that Americans have with the religion and the lack of education about the topic, the problem is aggravated (Zelizer & Allan, 2002). Coverage of Muslim women in the *New York Times* will represent this phenomenon: a country-wide disrespect for and misunderstanding of Islam, which will not accurately portray the situation of Muslim women at large.

There are many theories about the use of limited media coverage of Muslim women, but the current line of reasoning states that Muslim women are often victimized by the media, in order to demonize Muslim men (MacDonald, 2013). This tactic helps further efforts to protect the U.S. from future attacks, by creating an atmosphere of fear of and distance from followers of

Islam. The expected tropes and stereotypes are given more inches on a page or more seconds in a TV broadcast than the in-depth investigations of tragic events such as 9/11, simply because they are easier to explain and already well-known. This theory can be used to elucidate the ways in which the terror attacks in November of 2015 were covered by U.S. media.

The bombings that took place Nov. 13, 2015, in France, Lebanon and Iraq prompted days of continuous media coverage that followed many of the tropes that have come to be associated with Islam. Coverage of these events was largely focused on the attacks in France, which many scholars and journalists consider another attempt to "other" the Muslim majority countries of the world. Though the attacks in Tehran and Baghdad were of a comparable magnitude to the assault in France, the media spent time and space on the attack a United States ally. The majority of news coverage disregarded the fatalities that occurred in the Arab nations, who are neither United States allies, nor enemies.

The lack of media coverage of these places allows the public to accept viewpoints, like violence is an everyday reality there or it's the fault of the religion they practice. Both of these beliefs aid in the process of othering. The sociological concept of othering "is a process in which certain persons and the spaces they occupy are excluded from what is considered to be the morally sanctified civil life of a community" (Seidman, 2012, p. 4). By focusing on the violence enacted against western nations, by eastern ones under the guise of Islam, the belief that those eastern nations are of less value is spread.

The November 2015 attacks incited a renewed debate about the "violent" nature of the religion that became popular after the attacks of 9/11. NBC News reported an increase in hate crimes and anti-Islamic sentiments in North America immediately following the violence in November (Seimaszko, 2016). News organizations spent much of their time covering the attacks and the aftermath. One result was the closure of U.S. states to Syrian refugees. U.S. news media

covered the announcements made by individual state government as decisions were publicized about the fate of refugees.

Shortly after these attacks, the world was rocked again by attacks in San Bernardino, California, and Bamako, Mali. In response, U.S. presidential candidate Donald Trump furthered the anti-Islam efforts by suggesting the United States be closed to all Syrian refugees, and later to all Muslims. Outcry from both his supporters and dissenters became news, but the suggestion to shut down the borders gained more traction than most suspected (DeJesus, 2015).

The concerning part of these news reports is that they assume several claims to be true of anyone professing to be Muslim. First, all Muslims are the same because they share a common faith. As is the case with most religions, Islam varies widely across the cultures that practice it. From country to country and between sects, there are large differences in the beliefs and customs associated with the religion. Similar to Christianity and Judaism, there are varying levels of orthodoxy within the practice of the Islam, that are frequently ignored in news coverage. As well, interaction with local or native peoples has been shown to have major influence on the practice of all the major monotheistic religions, especially in regions that are predominantly Muslim.

Second, they prescribe to the belief that the majority Islamic territories are irreconcilably different from other areas of the world. Some of the differences that are often cited are the poor treatment of women, constant in-fighting between groups and a detrimental lack of progress. Reporters and their readers often choose to ignore the state of their country when writing about these phenomena. Lastly, assumptions about the inherently violent nature of the religion and its practitioners are apparent in coverage of instances of terrorism. News articles like “The Veil and the Male Elite” are examples of ex-Muslim women critiquing Islam as misogynistic. These experts, as they are often considered by U.S. citizens, help to create the violence narrative through which many read Islam.

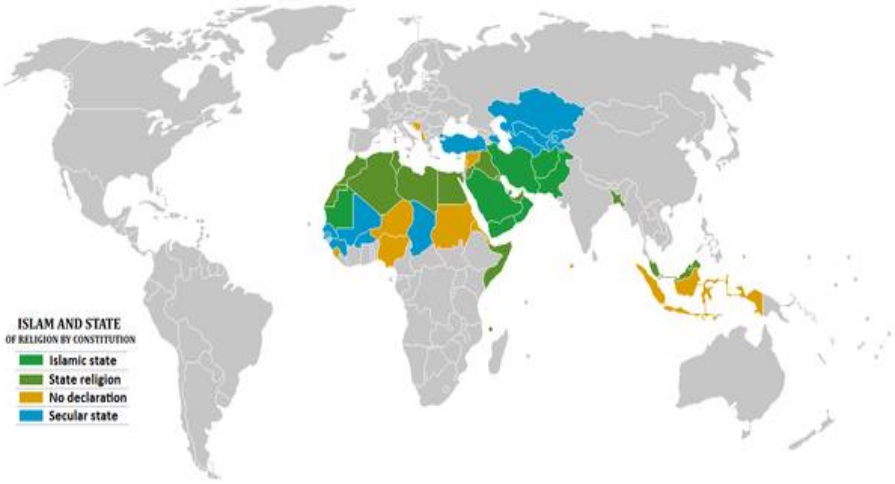

Figure 1. The Muslim-majority areas of the world are spread across three continents – Europe, Africa and Asia – with the largest population of Muslim persons located in Indonesia, at approximately 209,120,000 in all. Countries most commonly associated with Islam, such as Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan have less Muslims than smaller countries Morocco and Algeria.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim_world#/media/File:Islam_attitudes.png

In this paper, I will discuss the current theories about post-9/11 journalism, the state of Muslim women and some of the misconceptions that scholars feel are present in U.S. news media. I will then compare it to the results of a content analysis of the *New York Times* coverage of Muslim women and draw conclusions about representation of this group. In the discussion, I will outline the challenges of the research and improvements that can be made when I extend the research. I will also discuss the implications and uses of the content analysis in academia and for creating an educated media.

Literature Review

The deeply-entrenched Judeo-Christian traditions of the United States permeate many facets of the secular society, including the importance of its holidays and central figures. These everyday interactions, from Bibles in hotel side-tables to sodomy laws that take cues from the country's religiously conservative past, are some of the examples of prevalence of Judeo-Christian influence. The holidays and figures of Islam are not as widespread in the U.S. as those of their Christian counterparts. In a video created by Miss Egypt Sarah Fasha in June of 2015, she asked Americans about what she called "very basic questions about the religion of Islam" (Riceman). Many of the respondents failed to answer questions about the Muslim population, which religious figures they revere and the rights of women (albawaba.com). The results of her small-scale experiment were true to the findings of a PEW survey taken in 2014 that found 30% of Americans say they "do not know very much about the Muslim religion and its practices." An additional 25% said they "know nothing at all" (PEW Research Center of Religion and Public Life, 2014).

Accurate information on the dissemination of religious texts is difficult to find, because many of these books are given away and there is no central body for recording book sales. As well, self-reported measures of Bible and Qur'an sales can be misleading. Ranges from several million sales to upwards of 500 million can be found in records for either book. However, a PEW study conducted in 2014 offers an approximation of the numbers of individuals in the United States who identify with each religion. 70 percent or 223,230,000 persons reported being a member of a Christian denomination, while one percent described themselves as Muslim or 3,189,000 people (PEW Research Center of Religion and Public Life, 2015).

Despite the similarities that exist between all of the monotheistic religions, 65 percent of respondents said that Islam was vastly different than their religion, in a PEW Research Center study conducted in 2009, (PEW Research Center of Religion and Public Life, 2009). This belief

often stems from the exoticized images of Islam that are present in most modern media. Women forced to wear head scarves, men married to multiple wives and child soldiers represent many of the beliefs about Islam. A Google image search done on January 31, 2016 for "Muslim" yielded pages of results depicting violence and subjugation, interspersed with single pictures of people praying and children reading the Qur'an. A search for "Muslim women" done on the same day resulted in hundreds of images of women, all mostly covered.

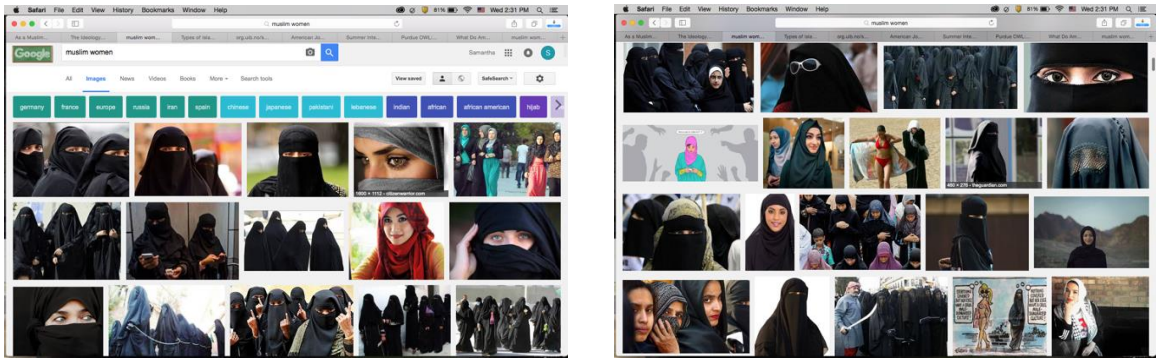

Figure 2. This image shows the first 35 results that appear on a Google search of Muslim women. It shows them in violent, oppressive or uncomfortable situations. They are all wearing *burkas* or *niqabs*, except four, in which they are clothed in more "liberal" garb. The next several hundred pictures are similar in nature and content to these.

Though Islam is growing in the United States, the general population associates the religion with terrorism, causing the group to be treated like enemies. A recent YouGov poll reported that about 55 percent of Americans had an "unfavorable" opinion of Muslims with the large majority of those individuals falling above the age of 65-years-old (YouGov US, 2015). Fear and lack of access to reliable information are reasoned to be sources of a media environment that is unfair, sometimes hostile to Muslims and/or Islam (Zelizer & Allan, 2002).

In conjunction with the attacks of 9/11, this unfamiliarity has bred a hatred for the religion and its followers that can be seen in western news media (Aswad, 20013). Edward Said attributes this U.S. unfamiliarity to the poor coverage of Muslims and Muslim countries in the 1980s (Karim, 2015, p. 116). He cited "phrases such as 'the Islamic mind-set,' 'the crescent of crisis,' 'and 'the Shi'ite penchant for martyrdom'" as common in coverage in prominent U.S.

dailies, like the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* (Karim, 2015, p. 166).

As well, media attention is limited to mostly negative coverage. The Iranian Revolution, September 11 and the ISIS/ISIL beheadings [2]are examples of major news events that showcased Islam in the past. However, if one were to look at historical media coverage, Islam is rarely mentioned until 1979 (Aslunty, Fayyaz and Shirazi argue that until Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini took power in Iran, "Americans tended to overlook the crucial importance of the religion of Iran" (2013). After 9/11, researchers and reporters alike showed renewed interest in the topic. The coverage became scare again around 2006. Fewer articles and less TV time was filled with stories referencing the faith or its believers. The coverage continued to decline in coming years, but spiked immediately following major events, like the death of Osama Bin Laden in May 2011.

As minimal as coverage of the whole religion is, coverage of the women is even more limited. Articles written specifically about Muslim women are few and far between, but most focus on the plight of these women, rather than their involvement in decisions or incidents. While many articles about foreign cultures or unfamiliar people come with disclaimers like "this is not representative of all individuals who meet this description," it is not often that they stand out from these generalizations. The sheer quantity of similar depictions is enough to outweigh the feeble disclaimer. Some of the most noted stereotypes cited in research include connections with terrorism, fundamentalism, anti-Semitism and a conflict between the "civilized" West and "barbaric" Middle East (Karim, 2006).

Conventions that are female-specific include the widely accepted belief that Muslim women are oppressed from birth to death. The most visible sign of this paradigm is the image of women who are forced to "veil" by domineering, oppressive male figures in their lives

[2] The Sept. 11, 2001, attack on the United States of America's World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington D.C., orchestrated by Osama Bin Laden, resulted in 2753 deaths, though many are still not identified. Shortly after these attacks, the U.S. declared its war on terror. In 2015, ISIS/ISIL publically executed individuals – by beheading – who they believed were a danger to their cause.

(Macdonald, 2013). Stories printed in western media often depict Muslims within these frames of reference, limiting the images digested by news consumers in the United States to those that support preconceived notions (Aswad, 2013). In reality, few Muslim-majority countries enforce a dress code and those that do, enforce rules for men and women of the faith (Bucar, 2012). Many also fail to acknowledge the African, and not Muslim origins of veiling practices. The tradition of covering one's face was a practical solution to a problem that was common among all desert populations: sand storms (Amer, 2014). Adopted by Islam, at varying times in the religion's history, head coverings served many purposes, from protection to modesty to status symbols (Amer, 2014). Lila Abu-Lughod wrote an article on anthropological ethics, in 2002, that "we must take care not to reduce the diverse situations and attitudes of millions of Muslim women to a single item of clothing" (786).

Despite the prevalence of the discussion about the monolithic veil, neither the Arabic language, nor the Muslim people agree on the concept of a veil. According to Bucar, there are three verses in the Qur'an that allude to covering or modesty, using the words *hijab*, *jilbab* and *khumar*. In each verse or an explanatory verse in the *hadith* – a report of the sayings and actions of The Prophet – modesty is defined for different people, in different circumstances and with different measures. When transliterated[3] these words have a variety of meanings, from curtain to scarf, and have since been interpreted to mean several different garments. Images of the variety of Islamic headdresses illustrate the idea that there is no right or wrong way to cover one's head and that the veil, as it is understood by each culture, is most often the choice of the wearer. For example, in Indonesia, new styles have been adopted as fashion statements, while in Turkey, women are forbidden from wearing head coverings in public work places (Bucar, 2012).

[3] Transliteration is the "to write words or letters in the characters of another alphabet." It is the practice of writing words phonetically in order to translate from foreign languages. When translating from Arabic to English, one must spell the word phonetically and for this reason, there is no correct spelling of Arabic words in English. Examples of transliteration used in this paper can be found in Appendix C.

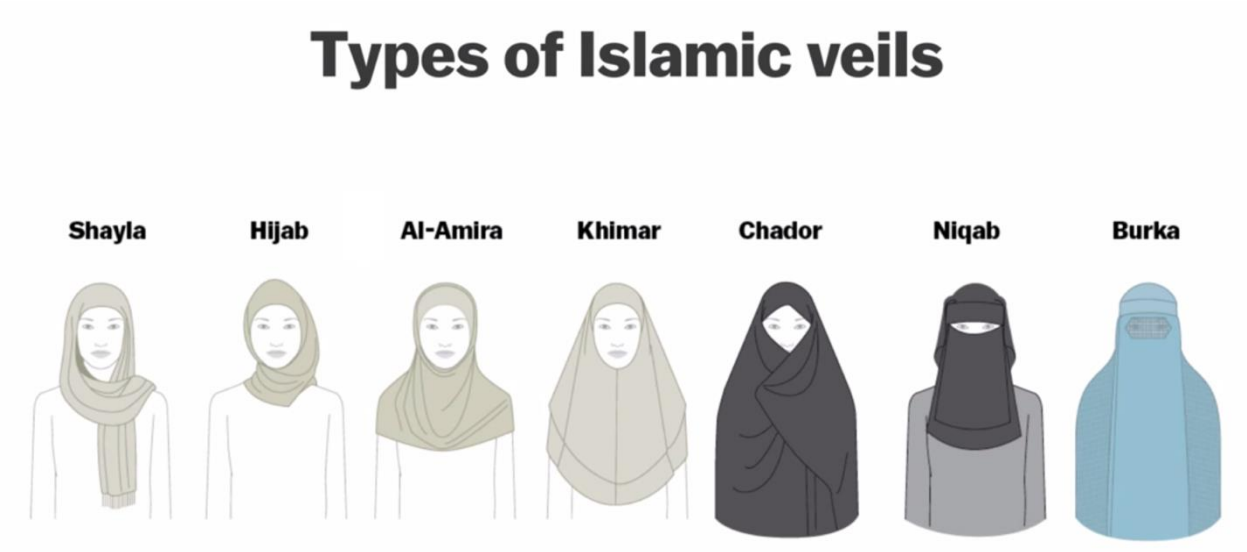

Figure 3. These seven common forms of dress for Muslim women shows the variety of styles of veil and body coverings worn throughout the Muslim world. However, this list is not complete. Due to interaction with the native traditions of each area and dealings with the West, *hijab* as all of these are commonly known, are unique to most women. As well, one must take the laws and norms of each country into consideration.
http://barringtonstageco.org/types-of-islamic-veils/

In the Qur'an, verse 33:53, also known as the verse of the *hijab*, describes Mohammed's wedding night. After the ceremonies and festivities have ceased, the male visitors to the wedding lingered and he implored them to leave. It says "when you ask [the Prophet's] wives for something, do so from behind a screen [*hijab*]: this is purer for your hearts and for theirs." (*Qur'an* 33:53, Oxford English Translation and Parallel Arabic Text). In this verse, the word commonly used to explain all women's Islamic clothing is used to explain a physical separation between the wives of Mohammed and the general male population. As the only mention of the *hijab*, it was originally considered ambiguous by many. However, current Islamic scholars have interpreted the verse as a story of Mohammed separating his male guests and his new wife by a length of cloth cut into a curtain, so that the two of them could have privacy after their wedding ceremony (Cherif, 2015).

The mantle verse (verse 33:59) discusses the protective nature of their clothing when in public spaces. Because public spaces were known to be male spaces and the female believers of Islam were to be kept safe in those spaces, they were advised to "draw their veils [*jilbab*] close to

them; so it likelier that they will be known, and not hurt." Like the first verse, the party responsible for immodest actions is men, but the party responsible for moderating that action is women. The covering applies only to free women who believe in *Allah*, as slave girls were not considered "sisters in the faith." The Qur'an indicates that there are differences between slave women and believing women, but does not explain this role in depth (Bucar, 2012). The hadith reports many instances of harassment and violence against women in Medina at the time of this revelation. This passage was divulged in the same way that the original fairy tales were – to teach lessons about safety to those most vulnerable. In the case of the fairy tales, this population was children, while in the case of the mantle verse, the population at risk was women.

The final passage which references veiling practices in the most explicit way is the most complicated of the texts. The hadith offers no commentary on the passage until later in history, by which time the practice of veiling was entwined in the Muslim faith. This verse is the longest of the three and refers to the use of a different sort of veil – *khumar* – to protect women and men of the faith from immodesty, in the same way that Catholic nuns wear habits and Jewish rabbis wear *kippahs*. Verse 24:30-31 explains the relationship of individuals inside and outside of a family situation. It also explains how the veil mediates sexual desires between non-family members (Bucar, 2012).

> "[Prophet], tell believing men to lower their eyes and guard their private parts: that is purer for them. God is well aware of everything they do. And tell believing women that they should lower their eyes, guard their private parts, and not display their charms [*zina*] beyond what is acceptable to reveal; they should draw their coverings over their necklines and not reveal their charms except to their husbands', or their fathers, or their husbands' fathers, or their sons, or their husbands' sons, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, their slaves, such men as attend them who have no desire, or

> children who have not yet aware of women's nakedness; they should not stamp their feet, so as to draw attention to any hidden charms. Believers, all of you, turn to God so that you may prosper" (Qur'an 24:30-31, Oxford English Translation and Parallel Arabic Text).

Such practices as polygamy are often regarded as another outlet for female subjugation. Where men could take multiple wives, women could marry only one man. Though the practice favors one sex, the original purpose was practical. Determining lineage was only possible if a child could be directly linked to the man who fathered him or her (Cherif, 2015). Though the practice remains legal in much of Africa and the Middle East, the practice has lost popularity for economic and social reasons (Abdelssammy, 2015). The Qur'an officially permits men to take up to four wives, if he can provide for each financially and sexually (Qur'an 4:3, Oxford English Translation and Parallel Arabic Text). In recent decades, the economic state of many Muslim-majority nations has been in decline and the legal requirement to provide for each wife and family has made this more difficult. As well, competition with and adoption of Western traditions has helped to diminish the practice in many regions where the practice remains legal or "illegal, but not criminalized" (Abdelssammy, 2015). Proponents of this practice generally cite the safeguard for women in this situation, as the ability to divorce one's husband, if opposed to a second marriage (Abdelssammy, 2015).

In "Arabs and Muslims in the media after 9/11: Representational strategies for a 'postrace' era," Alsultany[4] takes care to acknowledge that abusive relationships do exist -- and not infrequently -- but he attempts to divorce these instances from Islam, as a whole, and discuss how such actions say more about the type of person committing them than the religion he follows. Alsultany notes that when Christians or Jews commit acts of violence, Western media

[4] Evelyn Alsultany is Associate Professor in the Program in American Culture at the University of Michigan. She is co-editor of *Arab and Arab American Feminisms* and of *Between the Middle East and the Americas*. She is also guest curator of *Reclaiming Identity: Dismantling Arab Stereotypes.*

notes that these acts are not representative of the religions, but the same is not true of Islam, which people seem to believe is based on such acts (2011). Few people consider Christianity a "violent" religion despite the fact that bombing abortion clinics and "reclaiming" Palestine are violent acts being carried out in the name of the Christian God (Aswad, 2013). In a column by Nick Kristof, titled "The Muslim Stereotype," he addressed the subjectivity of religion, saying "I don't see any religion's influence as intrinsically peaceful or violent. Christianity inspired both Mother Teresa and pogroms. Hinduism nurtured Gandhi and also the pioneers of suicide bombings" (Kristof, 2006).

Ignorance of the faith and political systems of Muslim majority countries have created a rift which is easily filled by stereotypes and poorly informed beliefs. In the same way, many believe that men who commit acts of violence against women are among a few disturbed individuals, while most men are "normal" and unattached to violence (Berrington & Jones, 2002). However, this rule does not apply to Muslim men; it is believed that because of their religion, they must be oppressors and violent ones, at that. It is these beliefs that are capitalized on, in the media, which help to "other" those in the Islamic world from the western readers.

The sociological definition of "others" are those that an individual or a group views as different from him/her or themselves. Othering – the act of forming in groups and out groups – happens on many levels within and between societies. While discrimination and hostility are not innate to the process of othering, they are often associated with it (Seidman, 2012). One of the most prominent examples of this is the division between the West and the Islamic world, which is often used to invoke sentiments of us and "the enemy" (Alsultany, 2011). By framing the entire religion as though it were a terrorist organization, the media furthers the benign U.S. versus the malevolent other conception (Aswad, 2013). The Western-Islamic binary has become a standard for explaining the atrocities committed against women in Arab countries. This technique has been employed across disciplines to justify Islamophobic beliefs, like those

expressed in *Lost in the Sacred: Why the Muslim World Stood* Still by Dan Diner. He argues that Islam has hindered all attempts to modernize the Middle East, ignoring the crucial contributions to science, math, technology and literature made by Middle Eastern scholars (Aswad, 2013).

While media absorption theories, such as the hypodermic needle – which states that passive viewers are injected with media messages – have been disproven, scholars suggest that we use media generated images and personal backgrounds "to construct meaning about political and social issues" (Gameson, 1992, p. 374). The current state of Islamophobia surrounding Syrian refugees is an example of this theory. Constant bombardment with images of violence, oppression and terrorism has created an environment in which the political and social beliefs of a large segment of the population are altered in response.

Additionally, individuals make use of media to form judgments on personal identity (Jeffres, 2011). Using images that are provided by news outlets, such as the *New York Times* to construct an understanding of the Islamic world are problematic on both fronts. Teaching citizens that violence and oppression are synonymous with Islam harms those who do and those who do not ascribe to the religion. Gameson warns against a media environment that fosters such beliefs in the modern age (1992).

News stories inform the public with images of the world that are then used to "explain" the lives of billions of individuals, who make up entire countries. Despite that, the portrayals are rarely measured against the realities they attempt to depict. Once compared, the differences are often striking. In countries like Morocco, where secular and religious laws form the base of the legal system, Islam looks very different than those strictly run by *sha'ria* law. However, countries that operate on *sha'ria* law are still depicted mostly in terms of clichés and stereotypes. Due to the nature of religious coverage, reporters require research and dedication to comprehend the complexities of any world religion, especially one with which he or she is not familiar. Without an appropriate amount of exposure to the religion, those reporting on it cannot grasp or

hope to explain the nature of it to equally as uninformed readers (Said, 1981).

According to Gameson, a democracy should bolster a media system that allows citizens to gather a "coherent sense of the broader social forces that affect the conditions of their everyday lives" (1992, p. 373). The limited perspectives available in Western media simplify the varying beliefs of nearly two billion people into a concise list of themes, which in reality are indicative of only a small number of the whole population. This disparity does not foster a learning environment among the media consumers, therefore failing to promote the democratic ideals noted by Gameson.

Framing, as a communications concept, suggests that the "frame" or the way a problem, concern or issue is presented influences the choices that people make in order to handle them. The University of Oregon, School of Journalism explains frames as "abstract notions that serve to organize or structure social meanings… Frames are cognitive shortcuts…" (2010). Framing in news stories is accomplished by emphasizing certain portions of the article, while ignoring or downplaying others. In a 1996 definition by Fairhurst and Sarr, the researchers outlined three elements of framing: language, thought, and forethought. There are several techniques outlined in their paper that are used to frame, including, but not limited to metaphor, anecdote, traditions, and spin.

These concepts were already being employed in the 1920s by a scientist named Lippman, who said that the media could control public opinion. This belief was popularized by the agenda-setting theory which states that the media does not tell people what to think, but instead what to think about (Symposium on agenda-setting, 1993). Like the hypodermic needle theory, this was too simple to explain the ways that media interacts with the public. The agenda-setting theory has been revisited by individuals who have researched the media's role in political campaigns in recent years.

This disparity can be seen in the generalizations made about "all Muslims." The world's

Muslim population, though heavily concentrated in the Middle East and North Africa, is spread to every continent and totals nearly 2 billion people. Muslim-majority countries make up 52 of the 206 United Nations recognized nations. Anti-Islam arguments are framed so that the Muslims in Indonesia, Syria, the Netherlands, Thailand, Senegal and Morocco appear to be the same, despite disparities in language, interaction with native cultures, environment and landscape. These arguments assume that fundamentalism, which is a trademark of many terrorist groups, is a marker of all Islamic groups. Tahmeena Faryal suggests otherwise, speaking to this point when she says: "Innocent Afghans hate the Taliban and other fundamentalists and terrorists as much as people in this country and throughout the world do" (2005, p. 381).

To argue that women in Muslim countries do not experience the horrors expressed in news coverage of Muslim women would be ignorant, but to assume that the extent to which it is expressed is even among all Muslim populations is unjust. The women of these regions of the world deserve fair representations and coverage of their triumphs over unjust systems, rather than just repeated news about the systems. These representations help fuel the cycles of abuse that do exist by reinforcing the idea that their treatment is justified or incapable of being altered. Repeatedly showing images of abused, oppressed, inferior women is likely to help retain the status quo. The reoccurrences of the victim image further the belief – among women and men – that women are always in need of a protector figure, whether that be a man or a country (Berrington & Jones, 2002). To that end, empowering representations of women of any national or religious origin, are lacking in the coverage of U.S. journalists. Those that are common, use overly sexual representations of women as empowering, rather than strong women or smart women (Brinkman, Khan, Jedinak & Vetere, 2014).

In order to fully understand Muslim countries and their inhabitants, U.S. citizens need to be provided with images that depict all of the realities of these nations. In debating the value of undiversified images of "what it is to be a Muslim woman" I would like to shed light on the

variety of beliefs and interpretations of the religion. More importantly, I would like to draw attention away from the religion and onto the women who are subjected to the negative opinions of those who know only what they have heard in a limited media market.

Methodology

The purpose of the research is to support or refute the thesis: coverage of Muslim women in the *New York Times* will represent a country-wide disrespect for and misunderstanding of Islam, which will not accurately portray the situation of Muslim women at large. In order to assess this, a content analysis was designed. The goal of the analysis was to create a body of quantitative data regarding portrayals of Muslim women. Due to several errors on the part of the researcher, the results that were coded for were not quantitative, but rather qualitative. Many of the questions prompted anecdotal responses, which help to better illustrate the situations being discussed, but few usable numbers were ascertained.

The original goal is to gather 500 clips printed in the New York Times – both the newspaper – using the keywords "Muslim women." The *New York Time*s database, hosted by ProQuest, compiles all *New York Times* newspaper articles from 1980 to the present. Time constraints limited the ability of the researcher to just 200 newspaper articles. Because of this, several of the measures were scaled back appropriately to match the change. The final count included only 170 articles and could not account for the missing 30. Later research and a more in-depth content analysis of the same material will involve more comprehensive measures to avoid this concern.

Limiting the pool to articles printed after 2001 and before 2015 allowed for a sample of articles written in various time spans between the 9/11 attacks and the present. Fewer articles from later years are present in the project which have the ability to skew the results. Dates and historical events will be taken into account when drawing conclusions. The search yielded 6082 results, which were organized in chronological order, before every 15th article was chosen for the sample.

The number of articles per year are listed below. Fluctuations based on the events of the year are visible in the trends. As anticipated, the most articles about Muslim women were printed

in 2002, shortly after 9/11, and terror attacks in London in late 2005, sparked a renewed interest in the religion in early 2006. Another quantitative measure will be included in future studies that will count how many articles from each year were used, based on the sampling method. Due to constraints with technology, the researcher expect that fewer articles from the years 2010-2014 will be present than those from the years 2002-2010.

Year	Articles that fit search criteria
2002	*550*
2003	*519*
2004	*547*
2005	*476*
2006	*531*
2007	*478*
2008	*424*
2009	*350*
2010	*400*
2011	*516*
2012	*443*
2013	*397*
2014	*451*

Figure 4. Number of results based on year.

Instead of limiting the search criteria by "American" or "in the news," as was originally intended, the researcher chose to allow for the most results as possible. In choosing not to limit the articles any further than the general search term, the goal is to get the most general picture of the culture and its influence on women, as possible. The researcher felt that these limiting factors would inhibit my ability to make fair generalizations from these because they would be unrepresentative. As well, the coverage of these cross sections of an already poorly reported-on population is limited and would make drawing conclusions more difficult.

To make use of the articles, a coding sheet was devised that asked questions about the nature of the content. The articles and coding sheets were printed for all, so that a hard copy of each was available for analyzing and record-keeping throughout the project. The coding sheet which is located in Appendix A. was attached to each article. The code asked questions about the

presence of women or women's voices, references to subjugation or violence in Islam and mentions of the type of clothing and its meaning. Questions about the number of each representation were also included, though have proven less important than previously expected.

Upon later review, the researcher acknowledged that the coding sheets asked many extraneous questions that were not directly related to thesis of this research, but were useful in creating new ways to look at the project. Many of the quantifying questions proved to be unnecessary in making decisions about the articles, but led new lines of research. One such question was "how many of the subjects are male?" Though it was important to know the number of men in relation to the number of women, it was not necessary for all cases. However, this question did spark the idea of looking into the frequency of coverage specific to Muslim women, which will help to ground my understanding of the subject. The first round of coders were volunteers from Elizabethtown College community who received a 10 to 15 minute training session before coding articles. The training instructions are located in Appendix B. Coders were assigned 30 minute to one hour blocks over the course of five days. In this week, 89 articles were coded according to the attached sheets. A second round of coders was made of college students from Shippensburg University, Pennsylvania State University and Tompkins Cortland Community College – a small community college in northern New York. After this process, the researcher read, coded, and analyzed any remaining articles. Despite this system, the researcher needed to recode all of the articles to account for handwriting, questions asked by coders and subjective responses. In addition to the concerns about the coding system, the decision was made to consider the responses for their qualitative value, to be built on with quantitative figures in future research endeavors.

The goal was to have two coders read each article, but based on time and limited resources, this was not achieved. Each article was coded by one person and marked according to its use in the project. The articles which did not include details pertaining to the questions asked

were marked N/A and placed with coded articles. Of 200, the researcher assumed that as many as 65 would be considered N/A. Articles of interest were marked with a star and placed with coded articles. Lastly, any unfinished articles were marked with a sticker and returned to later. The coding sheets were then read for patterns and themes that emerged numerically. The articles were then organized into folders based on their relevance to the project topic and revisited as necessary. Several articles were referenced specifically within the paper to illustrate ideas, beliefs or standards that were present.

The content analysis was then used to draw conclusions about the ways that Muslim women are presented to the general public. By assessing the effects of such coverage on the viewpoints of most United States citizens, a basic understanding of the conflict between groups may be reached. Though only representing a short period of history, the sample allowed for a snapshot of the current social context that has fostered such news coverage.

Results

After compiling, coding and analyzing the results, the numbers supported the thesis that: coverage of Muslim women in the *New York Times* will represent a country-wide disrespect for and misunderstanding of Islam, which will not accurately portray the situation of Muslim women at large. Of the 170 coded articles, 101 supported this thesis, 17 refuted the statement and 52 were not applicable to the research.

Articles were sorted into these descriptive categories based on their use or ignorance of stereotypes, negative language or inappropriate references to religion. In articles supporting my thesis, the words that appeared most frequently were "terrorism," "religious," "extremism," and "fundamentalism." As well, the use of "jihadist" and "Islamic terrorism" were common in articles that sought to explain violence as a part or consequence of the religion. While fewer than half of the article focused on women—specific issues, those that did spent time describing the restrictive clothing like chadors or recounting the vicious abuses of arranged marriages. Articles written by former Muslim or current Muslim women, who are critical of their circumstances, also help shape the public's understanding of these women. Though cases of abuse do occur, these women cannot be expected or allowed to speak for all Muslims.

Reference to the oppressiveness of the "veil" was the most common example of this phenomenon. Many articles did not involve outright rejection of the practice, but rather unnecessary mentions of it. For example, when referring to three female bystanders, one author calls their clothing "flowing black chadors," but fails to give a reason for this description. Because of its distinctiveness from Western culture, this single feature is often the focus of misunderstanding and the center of discussion about the nature of Islam.

Despite this, there is no one word for "veil" in the Arabic language. The *hijab, burqa, niqab* and several other body coverings have fallen into the category of veil, but describe different items of clothing, adopted by separate groups and different ages. In addition to outward

mentions of the veil, macroaggressions are also used to express the distaste that some have for such practices. For example, Muslim men were rarely referred to as "wearing skull caps," but the women were almost invariably "covered from head to foot" or scandalously "uncovered."

The majority of the articles that supported the thesis were those that assigned the word "Islam" as a synonym of terrorism or violence. The number of articles that exist about Islamic violence is staggering, but stories about charity organizations run by mosques – much like those run by Christian churches – are absent from U.S. media. In none of the 170 articles that were coded, was a reference to Islam or a Muslim individual made without connection to a violent crime or terror attack.

Examples include an article titled "Leader of Pakistan Mosque Vows a Fight to the Death." This headline invokes a fear of violent Islamic leaders who vows to make a martyr of himself. A closer reading of the text actually tells the story of a violent attack against the mosque. The leader, Abdur Ghazi refused to surrender to the military invasion when they threatened to kill him, which is vastly different than what the headline suggests (Gall, 2007). Other articles reported on persons who called Iran a group of "psychotic, Muslim, fanatic animals" (Applebome, 2007). Other articles draw attention to the plight of racial profiling that has become a concern since the installation of the Patriot Act. In one such article, a man of Indian descent was afraid to walk down a street that had been attacked for fear of being suspected and charged for the violence.

The articles that refuted the thesis — either those that offered detailed and fair representation or that attempted to break stereotypes — were limited. The article that most clearly opposed my thesis was an op-ed written by Nick Kristof, in which he urged readers to reconsider their negative opinions about Islam and remember that most major religions have been used to promote violence. He acknowledges that "some Muslim societies do have a real problem with violence, with the subjugation of women, with tolerance." He continues by saying

"But the mosaic of Islam is vast and contains many more hopeful glimpses of the future" (Kristof, 2006). Another example – a movie review – details the stance of the film and steps back to call it "intellectually thin" and to question the validity of the documentary (Dargis, 2016).

Though the metric that I intended to use to analyze the representations of Muslim women were initially quantitative, the results of the paper were more viable as qualitative responses. The overwhelming number of articles which demonized, vilified, blamed or attacked Islam as a violent religion spoke volumes about the state of the national opinion. As I suggested when I began my research, and asked again in the results: if the image of Muslims, and specifically Muslim women is so negative in what is generally considered a liberal newspaper in the United States, what would these images look like in a more conservative context. The culturally-significant conclusions that can be drawn from this study are simple: hatred and fear are easy to spread, especially in the wake of a tragedy, like September 11. Newspapers, which have a large role in helping to shape the public opinion, are still largely skewed in opposition to Islam, as hypothesized at the onset of this research.

Conclusion

Choices like these are made by U.S. media outlets for any number of reasons. I would venture that most are not made to portray Islam as violent or "a danger" as one news briefing suggested, but rather because of fearfulness, under-educated reporters, misinformation, and a host of benevolent mistakes. Despite the possibly innocent intentions of the author or the news organization, the continued employment of oppressor stereotypes, violence tropes and images of helpless women is not changing the status quo. It is also crucial to note that reading a single understanding onto an entire population is unfair and bound to be inaccurate.

The national and political othering that occurs is turned into a cycle when news organizations feed fear by increasing circulation or ratings at the expense of fair coverage. 101 of 170, of the articles that were read showed a clear bias against the religion, as a whole, rather than objective coverage of news events. This suggests that a distrust of Islam, as a religion, still resonates with a large proportion of the U.S. population. With only 17 of the 170 articles focused on ignoring or disconnecting Islam from the stereotypes that surround it, it seems that the news and the country have a long way to go before there is a sense of equality.

The results also suggest that coverage of Islam, both negative and positive, fluctuated based on the current social climate. After the London attacks in 2003 and 2005, interest in the subject was seemingly revitalized. I believe the same would be true of the news coverage after November 2015 and the attacks in Paris. Despite this heightened interest in the religion, few articles made an attempt to explain the basic beliefs or interview believers. The content remained largely based in observation, not research. Those that did attempt to debunk myths or delve into the subject, often followed the "ask ex-Muslims how they feel about Islam" example and the result was stories of discontent, abuse and danger. This also must change in order to foster a news culture that creates articles and broadcasts that provide a clear image of the world, without bias toward or against any group.

Discussion

Some of the challenges that I faced while doing this research included a low number of volunteers, a high volume of articles, transliterating Arabic terms and creating limiting criteria. Without the ability to pay coders, I was required to work on a volunteer basis. About 30 people coded during the course of this portion of the project, each coding an average of three articles. The leftover articles were my responsibility to complete within the time constraints. As well, I was worried about bringing my bias into the paper.

The high volume of articles proved problematic for logistical and practical reasons. The 30 individuals could not code every article and the time taken to code each was ten minutes, on average. At that speed, I estimated that it would take approximately 82 hours to properly code all of the articles. Because students were working within short time blocks to accommodate the college lifestyle, the process was less efficient than I would have hoped.

Transliteration was the most difficult aspect of the project. Transliteration is the practice of spelling words phonetically with the letters of another language. For example, I transliterate (امرأة) as the sounds for the letters "a-l-m-r-a." However, someone who feels that it sounds like "a-l-m-r-e" can spell it accordingly. This means that no two people are guaranteed to spell words in the same way. Words like *moudawana* can be spelled any number of ways, based on how it sounds to the writer. Some of the common transliterations of this word include *mudawwanah, mudawana and moudawana*. Because there are no "correct" spellings for Arabic words in English, choosing one form and remaining consistent in its use was crucial.

In an attempt to consistently utilize the same spelling, I created a chart with all of the Arabic words I needed and have worked from that list. As well, typing in Arabic – on an English-organized keyboard – is a challenge without the proper tools, such as a keyboard overlay.

Creating limiting criteria proved to be crucial to the study, though my method needed improvement. Among the ways I would change the project, I would limit by the words "Muslim

women" in quotation marks to avoid unrelated mentions of the words Muslim and women individually. I believe this issue raised the number of not applicable articles significantly.

If I were to recreate this study for the sake of validity, I would change the format for the content analysis, the procedure for teaching coders, the number of coders and the timeline on which the project was completed. Changes that are necessary include more careful record-keeping and storage of the articles, as well as a more streamlined way to process them. I would also like to create a new coding sheet that looks for more specific references to events, people or problems that would help to narrow the project. The chance to pay a team of three coders, rather than relying on approximately 30 volunteers, would also be beneficial to the experience.

This project provides a good starting point for future research, that I plan to pursue in the coming years. I believe there are three distinct avenues that it opens. First, I would like to redo this research, given better conditions and more time, in order to try to recreate the results with the full sample size and more consistent coding. Second, I would like to narrow the research even further and focus on articles printed in 2001, in order to note any minute changes that occur after 9/11. Lastly, I would like to choose a Muslim country that is infrequently reported on and ethnographically compare the beliefs that are propagated in these articles with information from the lives of these women, through interviews and discussions.

In the choice to code only *New York Times* articles, the researcher hoped that the sample would represent the more liberal news media in the U.S. Considering the ratio of 101:17:52 (support, refute, N/A), it would seem that the overall pulse of U.S. news media does not read well for Muslims. There are plans to recreate and expand upon this project in order to add to the scholarly work that exists on Islam v. the West phenomenon that has been renewed since 2001. Though this research is not the first of its kind, it offers a closer look at the news coverage of Muslims, in general, and Muslim women, and the stories that this coverage tells. It provides many directions in which a researcher could go to build off of what has been concluded.

Appendix A. Coding Sheet

Date _____ Coder ID #_____
Article headline _____
Date printed _____ Byline _____

Subject of Article

How many subjects are in the article? _____ How many are seemingly important? _____
Is the subject _____ male or _____ female?
Is the subject _____ named or _____ anonymous?
If he or she is named, what is the name?

_____
Is the subject _____ a current Muslim or _____ an ex-Muslim or _____ never practicing?
Does the article quote the subject? _____ Yes or _____ No
If yes, how many times? _____
What were some of the quotes of the subject that express the main point of the article?

_____
_____
_____

Important Content

Where is the article taking place? _____
Where is the subject(s) at the time of the events? _____
Where is the subject(s) currently (if noted)? _____
Are there any references made to the attire of the subject(s)? _____ Yes or _____ No
If yes, what is said about it? _____
Are there any references to violence or abuse of any sort? _____ Yes or _____ No
If yes, what is said about it? _____
Are there any references to religious conflicts? _____ Yes or _____ No
If yes, what is said about it? _____
Sources of Information
Are there any sources or quotes from people/groups other than the subject? _____ Yes or _____ No
If yes, please note any information about these sources here.
Does the article cite any other news media? _____ Yes or _____ No
If yes, what news media did they reference in this article? _____

Please put an X next to any of the following words (or any version of them) for each time that they appear in the article. If the reason for its inclusion is unclear, write a note on this sheet.

Abuse	Equality	Oppression	Separation *
Aggression	Extremism	Politics	Shame
Covering	Fair	Radicalism	Simple
Degrading	Hijab	Rape	Stereotypes
Devout	Humiliation	Religious	Terrorism
Education	Inequality	Restrictive	Victim

Appendix B. Coding Instructions

Overview

By critically reading these articles for key words, phrases and commonalities, they can be split into groups according to theme. The themes will then be compared to realities of life for Moroccan Muslim women.

Objectives

- Quantify representations of Muslim women in news
- Create measurable categories
- Code approximately 500 of 6000 applicable articles

Activities

Please choose one article at a time to work on. The suggested method for effective coding is read the questions, read the article, then answer the questions, referring back to the article as needed.

1. Sign in on the coder id number sheet, then choose one article at a time from the "uncoded" box.
2. Write your coder ID on the article and the coding sheet.
3. Code as suggested above. You may mark the article as you see fit.
4. When finished, deposit the sheet in the appropriate boxes. *If you are the second coder on an article (coding on the back side), tear the coding sheets off of the articles and deposit them in their files.

Notes

- Please read carefully and think about responses.
- You should have articles that are different from those around you, so please don't try to collaborate on coding.
- Feel free to talk and be social, but make sure you are able to continue to code.
- If information that is asked for is not available in the article, write N/A next to it.
- If the article does not apply to the research, include an N/A on the coder sheet and article with your ID.
- For the word association, any version of one of the word's included would count. (i.e. oppression and oppressed).
- Separation is listed with an (*) meaning that any synonym (schism, split, ceding, etc.) of it will count towards a mark on the sheet.
- If you feel that something is significant and I have not given it a line or question, include it in a note at the bottom.
- Samantha will answer any questions that come to her attention.

Appendix C. Translation/Transliteration Chart

Arabic	Transliteration	Meaning
امرأة	*al-mra*	woman
القرآن	*Qur'an*	Holy Book
زِنَاء	*zina*	charms, beauty
حِجَاب	*hijab*	curtain
جلباب	*jilbab*	long coat, worn by women
خمار	*khumar*	head scarf
الحديث	*hadith*	sayings of the Prophet
شريعة	*sha'ria*	Islamic law
نقاب	*niqab*	face covering
برقع	*burqa*	garment covering whole body

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